

[The Blizzard of 1869]

[Talls?]

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W. M. [Emery?]

866 words.

THE BLIZZARD OF 1889 “ The worse blizzard I was ever in? Well, I'll tell you about it. It happened in 1889. I was working for the New England Live Stock Company. This was a big outfit down by Ft. Sumner. When the Government had moved the the Indians away from Ft. Sumner and abandoned the Fort in 1868, they sold t the improvements to Pete Maxwell. Then in 1882 they divided the land in forty more plots and put it up for sale. tho'ugh a man by the name of Lon Horn, who handled the deal, the New England Live Stock Company purchased a large tract of the land, and started one to the largest ranches in New Mexico.

I had come to Fort Sumner in 1883 as a messenger, and in 1884 I returned to the Fort and went to work for this Company as their foreman.

I ahd made several trips up the Trail with cattle before this trip in 1889.

It was in October of that year that we started to the new town of Clayton, with 2000 head of cattle to put them on the cars. Everything went fine until we reached the mouth of the Muerto. We made camp here for the night on October 30, the next morning. October 31, the storm hit just after daylight. We got the herd started to the [IL?] ranch, about seven miles up the Tramperos from our camp. C18 - 6/5/41 - N. Mex.

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Every one has always laughed at me about y old lead steer saving our lives in this storm, but he sure did. We were traveling up a ridge between two canyons and not sure of the location of the [IL?] ranch. We came to a trail leading down into the canyon to our left. I tried to turn the cattle down there as it looked like it was a used trail. Of course we couldn't see very far in that storm. Well this old lead steer - we called him John Chisum - just 2 refused to go that way; every time I tried to turn him he started right up the ridge in same direction we had been going.

Finally I said, "Well, if you know so blamed much about where you're going we'll just follow you."

I wasn't ten minutes until the ranch buildings of the IL ranch appeared in sight. Old John sure knew where he was going. We would have frozen to death if we had gone the way I wanted to go. We were all dressed in our summer clothes; we hadn't expected a blizzard this time of year.

There were ten of us slept in the bunk house at the IL's that night. We burned pine knots for fuel. It was forty hours before we were again on our way.

We hadn't gone far when the storm started again; this time worse than before, with snow falling every minute. This was on November 2d. We finally made it to Clayton, and corralled our cattle in a pasture just north of town in Apache Canyon, near old Apache Springs. This pasture was owned by a man named McCullum.

We went back to town to find a place were we could stay until the storm was over and our cars came. Here we found Jim Wiggins, who had his herd of three tho'usand head of cattle near Clayton. He had been waiting twenty days for his cars. The Carlisle Brothers from [Moab?], Utah, ahd trailed their cattle from Moab and were waiting for their cars. There were a number of other outfits there too; all together there were thirteen large herds of cattle waiting for shipment around Clayton.

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That storm lasted for thirteen days. When it was over there wasn't a cow to be seen. The had all drifted with the storm. There were 20,000 head of cattle left their herders and went south. Two hundred of the 3 Carlisle cattle had drifted over the edge of the Carrizo Mesa and died, but the rest went on to scatter over the plains from Clayton to the Canadian river.

The snow drifted higher than the fences and froze solid, so my cattle just walked right out of the pasture and drifted down the canyon until they hit the KIT fence. They followed around the fence, and we found them the next year around Adobe Walls, and Cold Water, Texas.

We were snow bound, but the C & S railroad got a snow plow from the Union Pacific railroad - paying \$500.00 a day for the use of it - and cleared the drifts off of their tracks. The stock yards were so full of snow that it would have been impossible to have corraled the cattle if they had been there.

Reports began to come in from the surrounding country; five men belonging to the Dick Head outfit, who were waiting with their herd for cars, south of Grenville - were frozen to death. A prominent rancher south of Clayton had been caught in the storm several miles from home, and had stopped at an isolated cabin for the night. After eating supper he started to go to bed, but as her he threw back the tarpaulin he found a dead Mexican in the bunk. This man had evidently been out with sheep and had been so cold when he reached the cabin that he had gotten into the bed rather than build a fire and had frozen to death. This was too much for the rancher, who got on his horse and b braved the storm until he reached home. Numerous other reports on the same order came in.

When the round-up wagons went out the next fall - a year later - all of these cattle were gathered and were again brought into Clayton, this time to be put on the cars and shipped.
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SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Library of Congress

Potter, Colonel Jack., Story as told to the writer Mr. Potter of his experience in this historical storm.